

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 06542 043 0

No 6341.3

1839-49



GIVEN BY

J. W. Parker, Esq.





---

ANNUAL REPORT  
OF THE  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
OF  
ROXBURY.

Presented to the Town, March 20, 1843.

---



## REPORT.

THE last Annual Report of the School Committee referred in some detail to the condition of our principal schools. It would not be profitable for us to go over the same ground now. We need only say that those as well as the primary schools still justify the good account then given of them, and that they have, we trust, in some good measure redeemed the pledge then given, that advancement must and should be forever their watchword. The number of pupils has been increased ; the means of accommodation enlarged ; the range of studies somewhat extended ; and the cardinal doctrine of thoroughness and precision in all mental exercises and acquisitions, more and more practised upon. Some of the schools, no doubt, have long been stationary, and are so still ; but we think none have gone backward, and the general movement is certainly onward. The committee are confident that no former examination has exhibited so high a general standard of attainment and discipline, as that which has just now been completed. We will not go into particulars. Let the past go, with its good and its evil. The good will remain in its permanent fruits,—the evil, whatever it may be, our successors must see to. Congratulations are of little profit ; and any unpleasant discriminations that we might make, had better remain in the files of the committee, for discussion and action at that board.

For the few minutes that we may claim a hearing of the town, we shall do best to confine our remarks to the general means of further improvement in the schools, and a statement of their pecuniary wants for the ensuing year.

The improvement of the schools would be greatly promoted, by a more regular *attendance* on the part of the pupils. Irregularity in this respect, the frequent absence of several scholars for a half day, a day, or a week, is a grievous evil to a school in every way. It breaks up the effective drill. It makes chasms in classes, gaps in recitations, fatal to a uniform and orderly progress. At examination the teacher finds, to his mortification and discouragement, that his exertions, for a whole quarter, to make a class do credit to itself and to him, are balked by the falterings and haltings of every fourth or fifth member, whose frequent absence has been permitted or required by his parent or guardian. The finest array is thus disordered and utterly dislocated. The whole school is encumbered and retarded in its progress by these unfortunate stragglers, harassing its rear and dragging at its skirts. Unfortunate we say, for very often it is far from being the poor child's

fault, that he cannot dress into line and expedite instead of hindering the march. Such irregularity is very bad for the child. The continuity of study and discipline is broken up to him. He may catch a little of the knowledge that is afloat in the school, but his mind will not be trained, he will not be educated. There are some studies in which the loss of here and there a lesson, is equivalent to the loss of the whole. The missing links vitiate the whole chain; the dropped stitches spoil the whole web. It is not to be expected that every child in town, between the ages of four and sixteen, can attend school the whole year through. Circumstances forbid it in some cases. We only say, while he does attend let him attend constantly, and lose not a day nor an hour, but from extremest necessity. So long as he is a member of the school, let him attend with as scrupulous punctuality and constancy as if he existed for no other object—every thing else giving way to that. There is no doubt that four months of steady, unbroken attendance, is worth more to a child's mind and education, than eight months scattered along at irregular intervals through the year. This subject deserves the most serious consideration of our citizens.

There is an evil of an opposite kind, rare indeed, yet sometimes seen. We occasionally notice in a school a bright ambitious child, zealous for study, eager for the palm, with a thin form, a pale face, and perhaps a hectic spot on the cheek, bending over his or her desk; day after day, year in and year out, absorbed in study; the brain excited and intensely active; neither play-hours nor the night affording the necessary diversion and rest. We rejoice to witness his fine spirit and scholarship; but we tremble for him. He is in danger. We would say to his parent, beware for the life and health of your child. Take care lest he become a victim to his own zeal, and your pride in him. Take him out of school for one, two, or three months, more or less, as need may be, giving him entire relaxation. Build up his body in the free air, and in lightsome work or play; save it from early death or decrepitude, and, in the end, his mind will be all the stronger and the richer for it. Do not quench his excellent spirit; neither let that quench the glow of health, nor the spark of life. There are not many such cases, but, if there be a single one, it deserves this notice.

There is a class of boys in some parts of the town, who neither attend school, nor have any regular employment out of school. They are usually such as are subject to no efficient control any where. Some have none to care for them, and some, no doubt, are poorly cared for by their natural guardians. The unfortunate children of poverty, neglect, ignorance, and it may be of vice, there ought to be found somewhere a friendly authority, competent to take them by the hand, to save them from the errors and miseries of their own ways, to educate them for the powers and dignities of suffrage and citizenship, which await all alike, the fit and the unfit, in the republic. Out of this unhappy class of the young must proceed pauperism and crime. A wise community should interpose, alike for its own sake and for the sake of its less favored children. Where is such needful authority to be found? Is it vested in officers of the commonwealth? or in the magistrates and fathers of

the town? or is it nowhere? It deserves inquiry. At least, any citizen who can use his individual influence, to guide and befriend the vagrant and neglected boy, will do a good work. Authority, even if it exist, will never be exercised to much purpose, if at all, unless it be accompanied and stimulated by a patriotic feeling, by true philanthropy, and great sympathy for the friendless and erring.

We will now ask and answer the great practical question,—what is the great thing next wanted, or most wanted, on the part of school teachers, in order that they may fill yet more worthily their high and responsible office? We cannot say discipline, drill, thorough lesson-getting, any display of intellectual attainments. These things must be attended to, and they have been attended to long and successfully. In most of the schools a high degree of excellence has been attained in these respects. In the efforts for the improvement of schools, during the last few years, these objects have necessarily held the foremost place; and we must still have progress even here, and have now no fears but we shall have it. And feeling secure on this great point from the system of instruction now in vigorous and successful operation in most of our schools, we feel that we can afford to lay great stress on another point, and press it in some measure proportioned to its importance. We mean the *moral relation* between the teacher and his pupils. The next great improvement in our schools is to be sought and demanded in this direction. We would not be understood as finding fault with our teachers, but only as joining with them in devising new modes and higher degrees of that excellence which they and we alike desire.

It is desirable, then, that the mind of the teacher should stand in a relation of cordial sympathy with the minds of the children. He should not only acquaint himself with their capacity for getting lessons, but their tempers and dispositions also. A school should not be a mere machine for turning out good recitations, but a scene in which the master mind is a centre from which all good influences radiate, to brighten and expand all the other minds. The heart of a child is a great study for his teacher, and he is but poorly fitted for his office till he understands that heart, and knows how to make his way to it. It is not enough that the children receive all his instructions and do all his biddings; we want to know what motives he appeals to, what feelings he excites, what spirit he diffuses. The young buds of spring want sunshine, and so do young minds—the sunshine of kindly and gracious words and looks; they must have it, or be dwarfed and chilled. Let us hear the ordinary tones of the teacher's voice in his intercourse with his scholars, and we can come to conclusions as to his usefulness, quite as just and important as when we have listened to the exercises of the classes. We can tell whether he care for the children's improvement for their sakes, or only for his own triumph at the next examination. And here lies the difference between a mere disciplinarian and a true-hearted, whole-souled instructor, who is a disciplinarian to be sure, and a great deal more besides,—a difference not sufficiently understood. A thorough disciplinarian, a successful ex-

acter of good lessons, is a valuable man as the world goes ; but when you find a man who, besides being this, has a sunny and genial spirit, an agreeable temper, a sympathetic heart, knows how to come at, and draw out and keep out, the best, most generous and pure and high-toned sentiments in the breast of a child, and to promote the growth of the heart and soul, as well as of the intellect,—he is a rare and a great man ; you cannot prize him too much ; money cannot pay for the good he does.

Corporal punishment is not, and cannot be, absolutely prohibited in our schools. There are some young spirits that cannot be brought under higher influences, except by this as preliminary. The rules of our board allow it only as a last resort. We would have it the teacher's strange work. And we trust it is such in our schools. No instance of such punishment, that has been investigated by this committee, has given proof of any cruel or unnecessary severity, and yet we hope that personal chastisement will be found more and more infrequent and unnecessary. We must not take the rod out of the teachers' hands, but we may hope they will never have the disposition, and very seldom feel the necessity, to take it into their hands. But whipping is no greater evil than scolding, if so great. Taunts, jeers, threats, sullen or sharp words, outbreaks of ill-nature and vexation, tones fixed into harshness, and looks unchangably soured, these are the pest of a school, the besetting sins of a teacher—tendencies incident to his position, and which he has pressing occasion to resist. These things alienate his pupils from him ; put a barrier of ice, nay of sharp spikes, between his mind and theirs. The intellect of the child may be sharpened and crammed, but his soul will be pinched and beggared ; his spirit will either be cowed and crushed, or else embittered ; and he is permanently injured, and that too though he recite like a book, and go through the drill with the precision of a grenadier. In all our schools we want to hear words of encouragement, tones of kindness. We would see authority tempered, not relaxed, by love ; firmness fortified by mildness ; heart answering to heart ; mind pouring itself into mind genially ; the common routine of labor and learning, become a labor of love ; and all the intercourse between the teacher and the taught, full of the tokens of mutual interest, affection, and respect.

But is this practicable ? this union of discipline and gentleness ; thorough drill and soft manners ; absolute authority and pleasant speech ; is it possible ? Yes, it is possible, but it is difficult ; it is a very high and very rare attainment. In its perfection we expect not to see it soon ; something of it we do see already ; vastly more of it we hope to see. It is very difficult. Whoso attains a high degree of it will show himself a superior man. It is the great thing to be attended to now by teachers and their counsellors. It is this that must mark the next great era in the elevation of schools. Drill and recitations were the last—this the next, the hardest of the greatest ; not to supercede the former, but to be superadded to it. The first step towards forwarding this kind of improvement should be taken by school committees. They should notice and appreciate other things besides the degree of stillness

in the room, and promptness in the exercises. They should observe the relation that appears to subsist between the teacher and his scholars; encourage the good points; suggest an amendment of defective ones. Good teachers, like ours, make it their pleasure, as well as their duty, to forward such kinds of excellence as they perceive their authorized advisers to appreciate and desire.

But this meeting is held for the transaction of business, we will therefore proceed to the consideration of money matters. Our pecuniary operations the last year are given in detail in the Auditors' Report, and there is no need of a recapitulation.

A large outlay upon school houses will not be necessary this year. The new hall lately fitted up in the Washington school house, will suffice for the wants of that school for some time to come. The basement room in the same building is now occupied by a branch of the Dudley school, and many seats still remain unoccupied. The new room for primary school No. 15, near Tremont street, was finished and opened last summer, and fully meets the wants of that quarter. The town have a good unfinished hall in their new school house at the Point. It is not required for use immediately, but probably will be in a year or two. The only new accommodation requisite this year is for the relief of the primary school No. 3, on the site of the old alms-house. The attendance of the pupils there has been at times during the past year as high as ninety. Fifty in one room of that size, with one teacher, is considered as large a number as is consistent with the health and good instruction of children. The committee recommend that another story be added to that building, that the school may be divided. The expense will probably not exceed \$700.

But while our extraordinary expenses for this year will be thus moderate, it is not in the power of the committee to gratify the town with any proposition for reduced appropriations. Many new schools have been opened during the last few years; and though a house has to be paid for only once, it entails a permanent burden for the support of a school in it; so that without much increase of compensation to individual teachers, the amount of salaries paid must increase continually, by hundreds and sometimes thousands of dollars in a year; and the other incidental expenses must increase in the same ratio. It is not *high* salaries that so swell our appropriations, but the great number of them. We cannot retrench in salaries; in some instances we have thought it just and expedient to raise them. They are still low even for the times—low, we mean, considering the qualifications deemed requisite in a teacher, and the compensation paid to persons in posts of less responsibility and importance.

The large number of buildings, of all sorts and sizes, under the care of the school committee, must be expected to subject the town to considerable expense annually for ordinary repairs. The wear and tear cannot be slight in buildings put to such uses, to say nothing of the effects of time and weather upon structures, some of which are very old, and some new ones not so good as the old. We apprehend that the large sums raised of late years for new buildings, and the support of

new schools, have looked so formidable, that committees have been more backward than a wise economy would dictate, in asking for appropriations sufficient to keep the school houses in good order. We have something of that feeling, and ask only the usual sum for the use of the next committee. Several of the houses, however, should be painted this year. The outside woodwork of the Dudley school especially; it is expensive and ornamental, and should be saved from decay. The Dudley also requires a new apparatus for heating it.

Having thus alluded to the larger items of expense, we submit our estimate of the wants of the coming year. We recommend that the following sums be raised for the support of schools. The amount is about the same as was raised last year for the same objects:—

For pay of teachers.....	\$8,930
For fuel for all the schools.....	500
For books for indigent children.....	70
For pay of school committee.....	150
For finishing and furnishing an additional story to primary school house, No. 3.....	700
For incidental expenses, including repairs.....	825
 Total amount.....	 \$11,175

With these remarks and recommendations we surrender our trust. We thank the town for the confidence they placed in us at the outset; and we hope it will appear that the interests of the schools have not suffered at our hands. This great cause of common school education, unapproached by any other, which the town has charge of, in the importance of its bearings upon the public welfare, we earnestly commend to the continued regard and watchfulness of our citizens. We bespeak for it a continuance of liberal support and fostering care.

We must take one moment to allude to the loss which this board, and the interests of education, have sustained, during the last year, in the death of the late Dr. Rufus Wyman. He had been with us but a short time, but he was wholly of us. His judicious counsels and efficient services in their behalf, have been, and will be, greatly missed. We know not where to find the better man he has left behind him. His value may not have become generally known; but those who did know it, will join with us in this expression of regret, and this tribute of respectful remembrance.

Respectfully submitted,

For the Committee,

ROXBURY,  
March 20, 1843.

GEO. PUTNAM, CHAIRMAN.



